

READING INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

MEMORANDUMS

About Memorandums

A memorandum is a business document that tells employees about upcoming events, policy changes, or other business matters. In today's workplace, the average memorandum is brief and informal. It usually contains a heading that indicates the sender, recipient, date, and subject. The body explains the subject in detail.

Historic memorandums are often more formal and detailed. Look for these qualities in this historic memorandum in which Thomas Jefferson assigned Meriwether Lewis the task of exploring the Missouri River in 1803.

Reading Strategy

Analyzing Text Structures: Patterns of Organization Informative writing can follow several different patterns of organization. Three patterns are described in the chart below.

Pattern of Organization	Structure	Type of writing in which it is often found
Chronological Order	Step-by-step details are presented in time order.	Do-it-yourself instructions
Order of Importance	Ideas flow from most to least important or from least to most important	Persuasive writing
Enumeration	Supportive details are provided in list form.	Brochure or sales documents

BUILD UNDERSTANDING

Knowing these words will help you read this historic memorandum.

commerce (KAHM ers) *n.* the buying and selling of goods

latitude and longitude east/west and north/south geographic lines that are used to pinpoint any location on Earth's surface

portage (POR tij) *n.* an area of land across which boats must be carried in order to reach the next stretch of open water

Commission of Meriwether Lewis

Thomas Jefferson

June 20, 1803

To Meriwether Lewis, esquire,
captain of the first regiment of
infantry of the United States of
America: Your situation as secretary
of the president of the United States,
has made you acquainted with the
objects of my confidential message of
January 18, 1803, to the legislature;
you have seen the act they passed,
which, though expressed in general
terms, was meant to sanction those
objects, and you are appointed to
carry them into execution.

...

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri
river, and such principal streams of it, as, by its course
and communication¹ with the waters of the Pacific
ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon [sic], Colorado,
or any other river, may offer the most direct and
practicable² water-communication across the continent,
for the purposes of commerce.

Beginning at the mouth of the Missouri, you will take
observations of latitude and longitude, at all remark-
able points on the river, and especially at the mouths of
rivers, at rapids, at islands, and other places and
objects distinguished by such natural marks and char-
acters, of a durable kind, as that they may with cer-
tainty be recognized hereafter. The courses of the river
between these points of observation may be supplied



Reading Memorandums

Historic **memorandums** differ in format but contain the same information as modern memos. Circle the name of the person who received this memorandum. Underline the sender and the date.

Reading Check

Read the bracketed passage. Then, summarize what you have read by filling in the blanks with your own words.

Lewis's task was to

in order to _____.

1. **communication** (kuh MYOO ni KAY shun) *n.* the action of passing from one place to another.

2. **practicable** (PRAK ti kuh bul) *adj.* usable.

TAKE NOTES

Stop to Reflect

List three things that Jefferson wants Lewis to observe.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why would Lewis's observations be important for future travel and trade?

Reading Check

What does Jefferson suggest that Lewis do when he has leisure time during the journey?

by the compass, the log-line, and by time, corrected by the observations themselves. The variations of the needle, too, in different places, should be noticed.

The interesting points of the portage between the heads of the Missouri,³ and of the water offering the best communication with the Pacific Ocean, should also be fixed by observation;⁴ and the course of that water to the ocean, in the same manner as that of the Missouri.

Your observations are to be taken with great pains and accuracy; to be entered distinctly and intelligibly for others as well as yourself; to comprehend all the elements necessary, with the aid of the usual tables, to fix the latitude and longitude of the places at which they were taken; and are to be rendered to the war-office, for the purpose of having the calculations made concurrently by proper persons within the United States. Several copies of these, as well as of your other notes, should be made at leisure times, and put into the care of the most trustworthy of your attendants to guard, by multiplying them against the accidental losses to which they will be exposed. A further guard would be, that one of these copies be on the cuticular membranes of the paper-birch, as less liable to injury from damp than common paper.

The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knowledge of those people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted, as far as a diligent pursuit of your journey shall admit, with the names of the nations and their numbers;

3. **heads of the Missouri** the sources of the Missouri River.

4. **fixed by observation** established the position of a place based on measurements or surroundings.

TAKE NOTES

Reading Strategy

Circle the letter of the **pattern of organization** that Jefferson uses in the bracketed section.

- a. chronological
- b. order of importance
- c. enumeration

Explain your answer.

Stop to Reflect

In the bracketed section, Jefferson says Lewis should become familiar with the beliefs and values of native people, so later settlers can "civilize and instruct them." What is Jefferson assuming about native people?

Stop to Reflect

What advantages could Lewis gain from being friendly toward the native people?

The extent and limits of their possessions;
Their relations with other tribes or nations;
Their language, traditions, monuments;
65 Their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing,
hunting, war, arts, and the implements for these;
Their food, clothing, and domestic accommodations;
The diseases prevalent among them, and the remedies they use;
70 Moral and physical circumstances which distinguish
them from the tribes we know;
Peculiarities in their laws, customs, and dispositions;
And articles of commerce they may need or furnish,
and to what extent.
75 And, considering the interest which every nation has
in extending and strengthening the authority of reason
and justice among the people around them, it will be
useful to acquire what knowledge you can of the state
of morality, religion, and information among them; as it
80 may better enable those who may endeavor to civilize
and instruct them, to adapt their measures to the
existing notions and practices of those on whom they
are to operate. . . .

In all your [dealings] with the natives, treat them in
85 the most friendly and conciliatory manner which their
own conduct will admit; allay all jealousies as to the
object of your journey; satisfy them of its innocence;
make them acquainted with the position, extent, character,
peaceable and commercial dispositions⁵ of the
90 United States; of our wish to be neighborly, friendly,
and useful to them, and of our dispositions to a commercial
[relationship] with them; confer with them on the points
most convenient as mutual emporiums,⁶ and the articles of
most desirable interchange for them and us. If a few of their
95 influential chiefs, within practicable

5. **dispositions** (DIS puh ZI shunz) *n.* leanings.

6. **emporiums** (em POR ee ums) *n.* trading centers.

TAKE NOTES

Reading Informational Materials

A **memorandum** is often written using the *imperative*, or command, form. In the final paragraph, underline three commands that Jefferson gives Lewis. Circle the verb in each example.



distance, wish to visit us, arrange such a visit with them, and furnish them with authority to call on our officers on their entering the United States, to have them conveyed to this place at the public expense. If any of them should wish to have some of their young people brought up with us, and taught such arts as may be useful to them, we will receive, instruct, and take care of them. Such a mission, whether of influential chiefs, or of young people, would give some security to your own party. Carry with you some matter of the kine-pox; inform those of them with whom you may be of its efficacy as a preservative from the small-pox, and instruct and encourage them in the use of it. This may be especially done wherever you winter.

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APPLY THE SKILLS

THINKING ABOUT MEMORANDUMS

1. Why does Jefferson want Lewis to copy his observations multiple times?

2. What instructions does Jefferson give Lewis on how to treat the Native Americans he meets?

READING STRATEGY

3. Why do you think Jefferson starts his memo by stating Meriwether Lewis's mission?

4. What is the overall pattern of organization in this memorandum? Explain.

TIMED WRITING: PERSUASION (25 minutes)

Identify one topic in Jefferson's memorandum. Write a brief summary of the topic. Remember to focus on key points. Answer the questions below to help you organize your writing.

- What is the topic? _____
- What details explain the topic? _____

- Which pattern of organization—chronological order, order of importance, or enumeration—works best to present this information?
